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The Final Particle *wa* in Japanese Stereotypes vs. Reality

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Abstract

The sentence-final particle *wa* is something that has predominately been taught as a female particle in the teaching of Japanese as a foreign language. However, from the information presented in this thesis it is demonstrated that the sentence-final *wa* is in fact two separate elements, one kind used by women and the other by men. It is argued that *wa* should be taught as two different particles united solely by the fact that they are homophones and homographs, but not synonyms; something that should not be a problem since the modern Japanese language is full of similar homographs that represent two or more syntactical elements. Regarding the sentence-final *wa* used in Japanese dialects I feel it should be disregarded since it does not possess the same syntactic qualities as that of standard Japanese and behaves differently depending on which dialect it is used in. It should either be disregarded, seeing as how it differs to such an extent from the standard language, or be taught separately according to the usage in the different dialects.

A brief walkthrough of the Japanese particle system is presented with focus being placed first on the sentence-final particles (referred to simply as final particles), then on the sentence-final *wa* and its usage by women, men and in various dialects.

Keywords: Japanese, linguistics, sentence-final, particle, *wa*, dialect, gender

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Conventions and Abbreviations

Glossing

The glossing system in this thesis follows the Leipzig Glossing Rules (LGR) with the exception of some of the glosses for the various particles. The ones marked with a * in the abbreviations list are my own.

Romanization

A modified version of the Hepburn system of Romanization is used throughout this thesis. Instead of macrons, double letters are used to indicate long vowels, as in *benkyoo* instead of *benkyô* (to study). Geminate consonants are transcribed as in *katta* (bought) and *nikki* (diary) with double letters.

Place names are spelled conventionally throughout this thesis. For example, *Oosaka* is written Osaka and *Tookyoo* is spelled Tokyo from here on.

Abbreviations

ADV - Adverbial	*ADVP - Adverbial Particle
ALL - Allative	COND - Conditional
COP - Copula	*CP - Conjunctive Particle
DER - Derogative	F - Feminine
FP - Final Particle	GER - Gerund
HOR - Hortative	IMP - Imperative
*IP - Interjectory Particle	*LP - Linking Particle
M - Masculine	NEG - Negative
NIMP - Negative Imperative	OBJ - Object
PAST - Past	*PHP - Phrase Particle
POL - Polite	POSS - Possessive
POT - Potential	*PP - Parallel Particle
QP - Question Particle	SBJ - Subject
TOP - Topic	

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 The Topic

One of the main traits of the Japanese language is its usage of particles to mark different grammatical aspects, a feature that makes Japanese very different to the languages we are normally exposed to in the West. This is also something that has fascinated me ever since I began my studies of the Japanese language. Hence, I have decided to perform a deeper analysis on the subject.

In this thesis the focus will not only be on the particle system as a whole but on a specific part of the system, namely the sentence-final particles. I intend to give a brief summary of the particle system and the various sentence-final particles in the Japanese language and thereafter go into a deeper and more descriptive analysis of a specific sentence-final particle: *Wa*. Furthermore I will analyze this particle from several points of view, such as difference in usage according to gender and dialect.

1.2 Data and Methodology

The system of particles and sentence-final particles will be explained in relative detail using various textbooks (both Japanese and English) and input from two informants who are both native speakers of Japanese. The informants are one male and one female, both natives of the Shizuoka prefecture and currently studying at Waseda University in Tokyo.

After this summary, the thesis will go into the matter of the sentence-final particle *wa*, normally classified as a “female” particle, and its usage according to gender and dialect. It will be discussed whether this particle really is a female particle or not.

Any and all example sentences occurring in this paper are either taken from some of the textbooks I will refer to, gathered from the internet or made up by myself and checked for accuracy by the informants.

Chapter 2

Particles

2.1 Different Kinds of Particles

There are many different types of particles in the Japanese language. The categories into which these particles are divided differ somewhat between linguists (Matsumura, 1969), but most Japanese scholars divide them into eight different types:¹ *Kakujoshi* (case particles), *heiritsujoshi* (parallel particles), *juntaijoshi* (phrase particles), *kantoojoshi* (interjectory particles), *fukujoshi* (adverbial particles), *kakarijoshi* (linking particles), *setsuzokujoshi* (conjunctive particles) and *shuujoshi* (final particles). I will now proceed to give a brief explanation of these forms before focusing on the sentence-final particles, which from hereon will be referred to as *Final Particles*.

2.2 Case Particles

As the name suggests, case particles mark the case, i.e. the grammatical function of the word it follows, such as subject or topic.

- (1) *Watashi wa gakusei desu.*
I TOP student COP.POL
'I am a student.'

- (2) *Kare no hon (da/desu).*
he POSS book (COP/COP.POL)
'(It's) His book.'

- (3) *Gakkoo e ikimasu.*
school ALL go.POL
'I go/will go to school.' (lit.) 'Go/will go to school.'

¹ These translations are my own.

Here we see the case particles *wa*, *no* and *e* which mark topic, possessive and allative. What can also be understood is the fact that Japanese uses the same form for present tense and future tense, that there is a polite form to the verb and the copula and that the subject is often deleted from the sentence and that the sentence thus becomes dependent on context to be fully intelligible. This is, however, not the topic of this thesis and information regarding these subjects can be found elsewhere (for example Martin (2004) and Makino & Tsutsui (1986)). However, what is relevant to this thesis is the fact that the different particles in Japanese can fit into several categories. I will return to that fact later on in this paper.

Two other important case particles are the subject marker *ga* and the object marking particle *o*.

- (4) *Zoo wa hana ga nagai.*
 elephant TOP trunk SBJ long
 ‘Elephants have long trunks.’

- (5) *Miruku o nomu.*
 milk OBJ drink
 ‘I drink milk.’ (lit.) ‘Drink milk.’

The subject marker *ga* is sometimes referred to as a marker of focus (Martin, 2004:65) in contrast to the topic marking *wa*.

2.3 Parallel Particles

These particles are used between nouns when two or more of them are lined up. The parallel particles are sometimes grouped together with the case particles (Matsumura, 1969:350).

- (6) *Pan to battaa.*
 bread PP butter
 ‘Bread and butter.’

- (7) *Meishi ya dooshi ya joshi nado.*
 noun PP verb PP particle and.such/the.like.ADVP
 ‘Nouns, verbs, particles and so on.’

The most common parallel particles are, as seen in (6) and (7), *to* and *ya* which roughly translates to ‘and’, ‘or’ and the like in English.

2.4 Phrase Particles

Phrase particles usually come after verbs and act upon the entire phrase.

- (8) *Oyogu no o yamemasu.*
 swim PHP OBJ stop.POL
 ‘I will stop swimming.’

This *no* is not the same as the possessive case particle *no* in 2.2, but rather a *nominalizer* used to nominalize the sentence (Martin, 2004:841). This type of sentence can also be constructed with the particle *koto*.

- (9) *Oyogu koto o yamemasu.*
 swim PHP OBJ stop.POL
 ‘I will stop swimming.’

The difference in (8) and (9) is, according to Martin (2004:841), that “*koto* makes a general nominalization that is abstract, habitual or remote; *no* makes a specific or definite nominalization that is single, immediate, concrete or directly perceivable.”

2.5 Interjectory Particles

Interjectory particles are sometimes listed as final particles (Koike, 1997:85) and express emotion from the speaker’s point of view. The most common ones are *sa*, *yo* and *ne*.

- (10) *Ame ga futte iru yo.*
 rain SBJ fall.GER IP
 ‘Look, it’s raining!’ (lit.) ‘Rain is falling.’

- (11) *Hidoi ne!*
 terrible IP
 ‘That’s terrible!’

- (12) *Sore wa dekinai sa.*
 that TOP can.NEG IP
 ‘I can’t do that!’

These particles can, as stated before, be seen as final particles, an opinion that I myself share as final particles too are a way of expressing emotion (Koike, 1997:85). What makes these particles different from final particles, however, is the fact that the interjectory particles can be “interjected” between clauses as a sort of adhesive. Let us look at few examples.

- (13) *Sore wa saa, kikanai hooga ii yo.*
 that TOP IP listen.NEG best FP
 ‘It’s best not to listen to that.’

- (14) *Nee, nani yatteru?*
 IP what do.GER
 ‘Hey, what are you doing?’

Here the particles actually appear between two clauses, or comes first in a clause, something that is not possible with final particles. This is most likely the reason of dividing interjectory and final particles into two separate categories.

2.6 Adverbial Particles

These particles mainly come after verbs, adverbs and case particles and act as adverbials.

- (15) *Sore dake wa dame da.*
 that only.ADVP TOP useless COP
 ‘That alone won’t do.’

- (16) *Kare wa arukenai hodo yowai.*
 he TOP walk.POT.NEG ADVP weak
 ‘He’s so weak he can’t walk.’

2.7 Linking Particles

Sometimes grouped together with adverbial particles (Matsumura, 1969:585), linking particles are used to link or specify an expression in the sentence.

- (17) *Chikara sae areba...*
 strength/power only.LP be.COND
 ‘If only I had the power...’ (lit.) ‘If only power would be (with me)’

- (18) *Kondo koso yatte miseru.*
 this time LP do.GER show
 ‘This time I’ll show them.’

In (17), *sae* is used to emphasize *chikara* and likewise, in (18) *koso* is used to emphasize *kondo*. One could argue that linking particles are used in the same way as word stress is utilized in, for example, English.

2.8 Conjunctive Particles

As the name suggests, these particles act as conjunctions, i.e. they connect two clauses to each other.

- (19) *Taroo wa itta ga, Hanako wa ikanakatta.*
 Taroo TOP go.PAST CP Hanako TOP go.NEG.PAST
 ‘Taroo went but Hanako did not (go).’

- (20) *Samui node, danboo o tsukeru.*
 cold because.CP heating OBJ turn on
 ‘Since it is cold, I’ll turn on the heating.’

It should be noted that the *ga* in (19) is not the same as the case particle *ga*, but in this case is a conjunction which roughly translates into ‘but’ in English.

Chapter 3

Final Particles

3.1 Different Final Particles

Final particles in Japanese appear at the end of a sentence and are used to express shock, awe, admiration etc or to seek confirmation from the listener. They are sometimes called *eitan hyoogen* in Japanese which translates to ‘exclamatory expressions’ (Koike, 2002:37). Final particles are essential in spoken Japanese since particles as a whole are the basis on which the language rests but also because the speaker must intertwine his or her emotions into the speech to make it seem relevant. Not using final particles at all gives the impression that the speaker isn’t really interested in what is said (Adachi, 2002:261). This correlates to the so called *aizuchi* (lit. signs) performed by the listener. The listener will nod and throw in sounds such as *un*, *hee*, *soo soo* and such to show that he or she is listening. Therefore, when Japanese people speak to westerners, they often find the situation uncomfortable as a European or American listener is likely to just listen quietly and, as is intended, politely until the speaker is finished. This is relevant because expressing one’s feelings and inserting them into everyday conversation is a cornerstone of the colloquial Japanese language, a factor that makes final particles almost invaluable. Consider the following four sentences:

(21) *Iku.*
go
‘I will go.’

(22) *Iku yo.*
go FP
‘I will go.’

(23) *Iku ne.*
go FP
‘I will go.’

- (24) *Iku zo.*
 go FP
 'I will go.'

These sentences all translate to 'I will go', but the impression they give is very different because of the final particles that follow them. (21) is in itself a complete clause made with just a verb, but it doesn't give any information about what the speaker really wants to tell the listener. However, (22) gives the impression of the speaker wanting to draw the listener's attention to the fact that he/she is leaving, (23) tells the same thing in a more soft and explanatory way and (24) tells the same thing but in a much cruder way, almost insulting.

There exist a number of final particles which differ slightly according to sex, age and/or dialect, but the most common ones are *yo*, *ne*, *no*, *sa*, *zo*, *ze*, *na* and *wa*. As stated in 2.5, some of these can be seen as interjectory particles, but I will call them final particles as they appear at the end of the uttered sentence and do not share the function of the interjectory particles. They (interjectory particles) can appear between two clauses as a sort of 'adhesive' or to catch the listeners attention, whilst the final particles appear at the end, and only at the end, of a finished sentence to express the speaker's emotions regarding the topic of the conversation.

I will now proceed to explain these final particles briefly before elaborating on the final particle *wa* and its usage. Explanations are written below the respective numbered sentences.

- (25) *Iku yo.*
 Go FP
 'I will go.'

Yo is used to mark assertion on the behalf of the speaker as seen in (25). Just saying *iku* would in itself form a complete sentence meaning 'I will go', but by adding *yo* the meaning changes slightly to something like 'I will go now, just so you know' (Martin, 2004:919). Another usage is shown in (26).

- (26) *Ike yo!*
 go.IMP FP
 ‘Go!’

Adding *yo* to an imperative softens the impact of the sentence and is often used colloquially among close friends. This usage is predominant among men while women use the same construction, but rather than the imperative form *-e(ro)* they will use the gerund form *-(t)te*. (i.e. *Ike yo!* becomes *Itte yo!*) (Kinsui, 2007:101)

- (27) *Sore wa ii ne/nee.*
 that TOP good FP
 ‘That’s great.’

Ne or the elongated form *nee* is used to add some softness to a sentence and to seek confirmation from the listener (Martin, 2004:916). Used on its own *ne* is a unisex particle, however combined with other final particles (such as *wa* or *yo*) it will undoubtedly give a feminine impression (Martin, 2004:916).

- (28) *Kore wa oishii no (yo).*
 this TOP tasty FP (FP)
 ‘This is really tasty.’

The sentence-final *no* is not the same as the possessive *no*, but a way to soften the sentence (Matsumura, 1969:679). It is a quite feminine expression (though it is far from exclusively used by women). It is often combined with other final particles such as *yo*.

- (29) *Ashita, nani o suru no?*
 tomorrow what OBJ do FP/QP
 ‘What are you going to do tomorrow?’

Another usage of *no*, as seen in (27), is as a question marker instead of the standard question particle *ka*. It should be noted that the two can be combined to *Ashita, nani o*

suru no ka? The mixing of *no* and *ka* is unisex with a masculine tendency while *no* on its own gives a feminine impression (Matsumura, 1969:679 ff.).

- (30) *Kore wa hontoo sa.*
 this TOP truth FP
 ‘It’s true you know.’

Like *yo*, *sa* is used to mark assertion or surprise, but it is a lot less formal than *yo* can be. It is mainly used by younger males and can sometimes be elongated to *saa*.

- (31) *Omae no sei da zo!*
 you.DER POSS fault COP FP
 ‘This is your fault!’

Zo is a very powerful and very crude expression used almost exclusively by men to add emphasis and force to the sentence (Martin, 2004: 922). It is quite rude and only used in very informal situations.

- (32) *Odoroo ze.*
 dance.HOR FP
 ‘Let’s dance!’

Ze, much like *zo*, is quite rude and almost exclusively used by men. The difference between them is that *ze* is a bit friendlier and can be used with hortative verb forms, which is not possible with *zo*. Neither of them can be used with imperatives.

- (33) *Sore wa ii na/naa.*
 that TOP good FP
 ‘That’s great.’

Na/naa is quite similar to *ne/nee* with the difference that *na* is, according to Martin (2004:916), “more rustic and vigorous, hence often used by men and boys among friends or people of the same age and social status”.

- (34) *Naku na.*
 cry NIMP
 ‘Stop crying.’

Another usage of *na* (but not *naa*) is that of the negative imperative which is constructed by adding *na* to the impolite form of the verb. This form is crude and almost only used by men. Women tend to use the negated gerund form *-naide*, sometimes softened slightly by adding *yo* (*Nakanaide yo*) (Matsumura, 1969:258).

It should be noted that *na* used as a negative imperative is not always regarded as a final particle since final particles merely reflect the speaker’s opinion towards that which is spoken without changing the meaning of the sentence. The negative imperative *na*, however, does in fact change the entire meaning of the sentence from a verb in plain form indicating present or future tense to a statement where the speaker forbids someone from doing something. However, since it does appear at the end of a sentence I have chosen to treat the negative imperative marker *na* as a final particle.

3.2 The Final Particle *Wa*

The final *wa*, the main topic of this thesis, is used in a similar way to *ne*, i.e. it is used to soften the sentence (Matsumura, 1969:676). The distributional difference between *wa* and *ne* is that *wa* cannot be used with hortative forms. It is said to be a feminine particle, but it is used by both sexes, albeit with a slight difference in meaning (Matsumura, 1969:676-677). It can also be combined with other particles such as *ne* or *yo*, something that gives it a very feminine touch.

- (35) *Watashi ga shimasu wa*
 I.F/M SBJ do.POL FP
 ‘I’ll do it.’

- (36) *Ore mo iku wa.*
 I.M too go FP
 ‘I’ll go too.’

The male version of *wa* is as seen in (36) and acts as a counterpart to the female *wa* in (35). One of the differences to that used by women is the fact that the male form never is used with polite forms, only with plain style forms. Also, the male form is never combined with other final particles as the female form can be (Martin, 2004:920). This is a very brief summary of *wa*, but the particle and its functions will be discussed in detail in chapter 4.

Chapter 4

Different Aspects of Wa

4.1 A Female Particle?

In the teaching of modern Japanese, final particles are almost always divided into three sections; male particles, female particles and unisex particles (Adachi, 2002:265). The final particle *wa* is almost exclusively regarded as a female particle and is taught as such. Although female speakers of Japanese do use *wa*, it is also used frequently by male speakers, something several scholars of Japanese have noted (Matsumura, 1969:677; Hanaoka McGloin, 2005:229). If this is the case, why is *wa* still being taught as a female particle? Is there a difference between the *wa* used by females and the one used by males? Let us look at the usage of *wa* by male and female speakers.

4.1.1 Female Usage

This type of *wa* is pronounced with a rising intonation and is used exclusively by women (Hanaoka McGloin, 2005:230). Its function is to express a slight exclamation or emotion from the speaker and could, possibly, be replaced by an exclamation mark if writing in English (Matsumura, 1969:676).

The female *wa* is commonly used when speaking to family members or close friends. It is then usually attached to the plain form of the predicate. These sentences, used by Hanaoka McGloin (2005:228-229) show the *wa* used together with verbs (37), adjectives (38) and alongside other final particles (39-40). (The glossing is my own)

- (37) *Watashi ga yaru wa.*
I.F/M SBJ do FP
'I will do it.'

- (38) *Ocha ga oishii wa.*
tea SBJ tasty FP
'Tea is delicious.'

- (39) *Hayaku dekaikenai to okureru wa yo.*
 quickly go out.NEG if be late FP FP
 ‘If you don’t leave soon you will be late.’

- (40) *Yappari ryoohoo tsukau wa ne.*
 as I thought both use FP FP
 ‘Well, we use both, right?’

The *wa* can also be attached to polite forms of the predicate to make the sentence more formal.

- (41) *Goshidoo, itadakimasu wa.*
 advice.POL take.POL FP
 ‘I will make good use of Your advice.’

However, *wa* is not used in correct formal speech. Hanaoka McGloin (2005:229) states that the use of *wa* is inappropriate when:

...the speaker and the addressee ‘maintain an official relationship’, such as business relationships, formal interviews etc. *Wa* demands that the speaker and the addressee have a personal relationship.

It would seem that *wa* attached to the polite form of the predicate is used among friends when the situation calls for a more formal atmosphere.

Regarding the combination of *wa* with other syntactical elements, I have previously stated that it, for example, can be used with other final particles but not with hortatives. In this modified² chart from Adachi (2002:271) we get a good overall view of when *wa* can and cannot be used (O means it can be used and X means it cannot be used).

² Here, modified means that it is translated by the author and that the format of the chart has been changed.

Solo	O
Copula (polite)	O
Copula (plain)	O
Noun	X
Adjective	O
Verb	O
Imperative	X
Gerund	X
Hortative	X
Conjectural	X
External evidence	O

Conjectural in this chart means the Japanese word *daroo* which is a modal sentence extension that can translate into ‘I think’ or ‘I guess’. Likewise, external evidence is the adjectival predicate extension *rashii* that can be translated into ‘it is said that’ or ‘it seems that’ (Larm, 2006:112-113,162). *Solo* means when it is used in an “inner monologue”, i.e. when speaking to yourself.

The forms with which *wa* cannot be used are, as we see in the chart, directly with nouns, with imperatives, gerunds, hortatives and conjecturals. That would result in the following ungrammatical sentences:

- (42) **Yama* *wa.*
 mountain FP
 ‘It’s a mountain.’

- (43) **Ike* *wa!*
 go.IMP FP
 ‘Go!’

- (44) **Itte* *wa!*
 go.GER FP
 ‘Go!’

(45) **Tabemashoo wa.*
 eat.HOR FP
 ‘Let’s eat.’

(46) **Muzukashii daroo wa.*
 difficult I think FP
 ‘I think it will be difficult.’

Wa is often compared with the final particle *yo*, however as seen in this chart and these sentences, *wa* has certain restrictions which *yo* does not. In fact, *yo* can be used in all instances indicated in the chart. It would seem that *yo* and *wa* has less in common than you would think despite the fact that the two are, as previously stated, often compared to each other.

4.1.2 Male Usage

The male version of *wa* is pronounced with a falling intonation and denotes surprise or emotion from the speaker (Matsumura, 1969:677).

This *wa* is used by men in very informal situations and never with polite forms of the predicate (Martin, 2004:920). These sentences from Matsumura (1969:677) show how the male *wa* can be used. The glossing and translations are my own.

(47) *Mainichi mattaku furu wa.*
 every day absolutely fall(rain) FP
 ‘I tell you, it rains every single day.’

(48) *Kono toshi ni naru to, mago no*
 this age to become when grandchild POSS
omamori mo hone ga oreru wa.
 care too troublesome FP
 ‘When you get to this age, even caring for your grandchildren becomes a pain.’

- (49) *Sonna ni hoshikereba, kurete yaru wa.*
 that much want.COND give.GER do FP
 ‘If you want it that badly, I’ll give it to you.’

The male *wa* can also be used in iterated clauses, i.e. when the verb in the clause is repeated as a way of conveying strong surprise or emotion (Matsumura, 1969:677).

- (50) *Gattsuite, kuu wa kuu wa.*
 devour.GER eat.DER FP eat.DER FP
 ‘He gobs it down like a pig!’

The use of *wa* in iterated clauses is most commonly heard in the conversations of older Japanese men, and quite unusual with younger speakers (Hanaoka McGloin, 2005:230). My informants also confirm that this usage is almost exclusive to native speakers age 40 and upwards.

To better understand the difference between the syntactical properties of the female and the male *wa*, let us look at a similar chart as the one from Adachi regarding the female *wa*. This chart is constructed by me based on the observations I have made regarding the usage of the male *wa*.

Solo	O
Copula (polite)	X
Copula (plain)	X
Noun	X
Adjective	O
Verb (plain)	O
Verb (polite)	X
Imperative	X
Gerund	X
Hortative	X
Conjectural	X
External evidence	X

As we see here, the male *wa* is only used in monologues, with adjectives and with verbs (only in plain style, never polite). Hence, we can assume that the usage of *wa* is more restricted, or rather that it has a more limited range of function, for men than for women. Let us look at the forms with which the male *wa* cannot be used:

- (51) **Kuruma da wa.*
car COP FP
‘It’s a car.’

- (52) **Kuruma desu wa.*
car COP.POL FP
‘It’s a car.’

- (53) **Kuruma wa.*
car FP
‘It’s a car.’

- (54) **Ikimasu wa.*
go.POL FP
‘I will go.’

- (55) **Yare* *wa!*
 do.DER.IMP FP
 ‘Do it!’
- (56) **Yatte* *wa!*
 do.DER.GER FP
 ‘Do it!’
- (57) **Yaroo/Yarimashoo* *wa.*
 do.DER.HOR/do.DER.HOR.POL FP
 ‘Let’s do it.’
- (58) **Neko daroo wa.*
 cat I think FP
 ‘I think it’s a cat.’
- (59) **Neko rashii wa.*
 cat seems like FP
 ‘It seems like it’s a cat.’

The informants also admit the fact that younger men can use *wa* in situations where *yo* would normally be used. Take a look at this sentence:

- (60) *Jaa, sagasu wa.*
 alright search FP
 ‘Alright then, I’ll look for you.’

The context of this sentence that was uttered to me personally is that of a Japanese male friend asking me if I had a site on Facebook. When replying that I had one, he responded as in (60) that he would look for me there. Normally, *yo* would be used if the speaker and the listener are somewhat close, *zo* if they are really close and *wa* if they are, as in this case, not yet too close as a way of adding a degree of politeness and softness to a non-polite sentence. The informants confirm that they have heard similar

sentence constructions from younger male friends in the greater Tokyo area (i.e. the main area where standard Japanese (in Japanese *Hyoojungo*) is spoken) where speaker and listener are close enough to speak without using polite forms, but not yet so close that they can begin using ruder forms of particles and such as a way of indicating friendship and intimacy.

4.2 Usage in Various Dialects

Final *wa* is widely used in western Japan, predominately around Osaka and Kyoto, but also in other places such as Sapporo in the northern parts of the country and in the Okinawa islands (Fujiwara, 1997:651). The dialectal *wa* exists in many different forms and gives different impressions in different situations, also depending on which dialect it is used in. Martin (2004:920) has noted the usage of the form *desu wa na* in the Kansai area of Japan (the Osaka, Kyoto and Kobe area), such as in the following sentence:

- (61) *Sore ga mondai desu wa na.*
 that SBJ problem COP.POL FP FP
 ‘That’s the problem, you know.’

This construction differs somewhat from the standard *wa*, since the *wa* used in Tokyo Japanese is used to convey emotion or surprise while the Kansai *wa* roughly translates into ‘you know’ or ‘so to speak’.

Fujiwara (1997:651) has noted other dialectal usages in different parts of Japan. For example, in Okinawa the usage of *wa* is usually equivalent to that of *yo*.³

- (62) *Mata kuu wa.*
 again come FP
 ‘He’ll come again.’

It should be noted that these dialectal words, especially those of Okinawa, are very different from standard Japanese and sometimes the standard language and the dialects are not mutually intelligible.

³ Here, the sentences (62)-(66) are taken from Fujiwara, but the glossing and translations are my own.

The *wa* used in the Chuugoku and Kinki areas of Japan is quite similar to that used on Okinawa. It is also noted that men use *wa* more than usually in these areas.

- (63) *Akimahen* *wa*.
 impossible (lit. possible.NEG) FP
 ‘It’s no use, I tell you.’

In the Chuubu area, *wa* can represent both *yo* and *ne* depending on the situation. Also, men use *wa* with a rising intonation here, something that is rarely (if ever) heard among men in standard Japanese.

- (64) *Yappari zooyoo ga iru sakai wa*.
 as I thought chores SBJ need because FP
 ‘Well, it’s because the chores are necessary, right?’

The biggest difference comes in the northern parts of Japan, the Toohoku district, where *wa* can represent *yo* and *ne*, but also work as a ‘please’ construction or a very mild and polite imperative and as a question marker, something that is impossible with the standard *wa*.

- (65) *Nagete kunai wa*.
 throw.GER please FP
 ‘Please throw it.’
- (66) *Nanji-n natta waa?*
 what hour become.PAST FP
 ‘What time is it?’

This clearly indicates that the dialectal *wa* differs quite a lot from the *wa* used in standard Japanese and also differs from area to area of the country.

4.3 Reflections

The *wa* used by men, the one used by women and the one used in the various dialects of Japanese seem to differ not only in intonation and pronunciation, but also (perhaps mainly) in meaning and grammatical composition. The female *wa* seeks to convey a feeling of emotion or softness while the male *wa* is mainly used to denote surprise or exclamation. Also, the female *wa* is almost only used with very close friends or family members as a marker of intimacy while the male *wa* also can be used to add a measure of politeness to a crude sentence. To add intimacy to a sentence while speaking with close friends, a man is more likely to use a crude sentence and add an even cruder particle (such as *zo* or *ze*). This to show the listener that “we are so good friends that I can insult you without you taking offense”.

Furthermore, the dialectal *wa* differs in meaning and composition according to its geographical position and can be used in contexts impossible to the standard language, such as those seen in (65) and (66) where *wa* is used with both imperatives and as a question marker. Imperatives can be combined, as noted earlier, with *yo* to soften the request and *no* can be used as a question marker in lieu of the usual *ka*; something that suggests that the dialectal *wa* is some sort of ‘particle hybrid’ used to fill a number of different functions.

Judging by the facts uncovered in this thesis, one is almost forced to realize the diversity of *wa* and its many usages and, in my opinion, it becomes quite obvious that the way *wa* is viewed today is far too narrow and needs to be revised. My research may not be extensive enough to spark a ‘linguistic revolution’ regarding the teaching and viewing of *wa*, but it is my hope that this thesis will awaken the interest of someone willing to take my research to a higher level.

Conclusion

The sentence-final *wa* has always been taught as a female particle when teaching the Japanese language to foreigners, this despite the fact that there is a lot of evidence suggesting that it is not exclusively used by women. As we have seen throughout this thesis, the usage of *wa* among male speakers of Japanese is abundant, albeit quite restricted to certain age groups.

It is my opinion that the sentence-final *wa* used by women and the one used by men are two completely different particles and should be taught as such. The various other grammatical elements they can be combined with and the feeling they seek to communicate is quite different and therefore I believe that the two types of *wa* are simply homophones as well as homographs, but not synonyms. Teaching *wa* as one word with two separate meanings should not be a problem neither for teachers nor for students of Japanese since the modern Japanese language has several such elements. For example, *no* can be used as a possessive marker, as well as a nominalizer and as a substitute for the subject marker *ga*. These three are different particles, but they are all written with the same letter, namely *no*, and they are taught as separate syntactical elements from the beginning. Hence, teaching *wa* as two separate elements should not be a problem.

What could pose some difficulties, however, is the fact that *wa* is still so firmly regarded as a female particle; something that could create resistance against changing the common way that *wa* is de facto being viewed today. My informers confirm the fact that, when asked, they too think of *wa* as a marker of femininity. Why this is, I am not sure. Nor does there seem to be any clear explanation as to why the analysis of *wa* always generates an image of femininity.

However, some scholars argue that it is rooted in the standardization of the Japanese language during the Meiji Restoration, the so-called *Genbun Ittchi* movement (Ottosson & Ekholm, 2007:224). This movement served to simplify the written language to a form more closely related to the spoken language (older literary Japanese is very archaic and difficult to understand compared to the spoken version of the language). From this linguistic movement, thoughts of standardizing the language of the women of Japan grew stronger since the way of expressing oneself in speech was something that differed a lot depending on social status, profession etc. The

female university students of Japan started what was named the *Teyodawa Kotoba* movement, the name being derived from the “femaleness” achieved by using the gerund form *-te* for mild imperatives, the final particles *yo* and *wa* for softening the sentence as a whole and the plain form copula *da* used or left out in certain situations when it would be treated differently by a man. The female university students at this time (circa 1870-1900) used this type of language and soon it was seen as a model for female polite speech. This could be why *wa* is still regarded as a marker of femininity. However, this thesis seems hard to confirm. One can only suggest and speculate.

On the usage of *wa* in various Japanese dialects it seems as if it is not the same *wa* as the one used in modern standard Japanese since it does not possess the same syntactical qualities. It gives a slightly different impression and holds a different meaning to the *wa*, or *was* since there seems to be two of them, used in standard Japanese. Furthermore, *wa* behaves differently and gives different impressions depending on which dialect it is used in. This leads one to believe that the dialectal *wa* should be disregarded, or at least be treated separately, when studying *wa* in standard Japanese since it apparently is a third homograph, not synonym, to the male and female *wa* in the standard language.

In conclusion, as previously stated, my opinion is that the final *wa* used by men and that used by women are two separate grammatical elements that should be taught as just that with the dialect *wa* being regarded as a third separate entity while its usage differs from that of the standard Japanese language. This thesis has by no means investigated every possible angle and aspect of *wa*, and more extensive research should be conducted to fully confirm this writer’s hypothesis.

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